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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000517

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN (PERRY)

SENSITIVE

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: GOTX RAIDS UNREGISTERED CHRISTIAN MEETING

REF: DRL E-MAIL TO POST; ASHGABAT OI MAY 12

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UNREGISTERED RELIGIOUS MEETING RAIDED

¶1. (SBU) POLOFF WAS ABLE TO CONFIRM REPORTS ABOUT GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES BREAKING UP A NON-REGISTERED CHRISTIAN GROUP MEETING AT A PRIVATE RESIDENCE IN ASHGABAT ON MAY 3 DURING A MAY 16 MEETING WITH U.S. CITIZEN AND DIRECTOR OF THE LOCAL EXPORT/IMPORT COMPANY ENGEDI PAUL KIM. ACCORDING TO KIM, A MEMBER OF THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY NETWORK ASSOCIATION, MORE THAN 15 OFFICIALS REPRESENTING SIX DIFFERENT GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, INCLUDING THE POLICE, THE NATIONAL SECURITY MINISTRY, THE COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS (CRA), CITY MUNICIPAL AUTHORITIES, AND THE STATE SERVICE FOR REGISTRATION OF FOREIGNERS BROKE UP A WORSHIP SERVICE MEETING OF 13 MOSTLY ETHNIC TURKMEN MEMBERS OF THE UNREGISTERED NONDENOMINATIONAL CHRISTIAN GROUP SOYGI. PHILIP JANG, A KOREAN CITIZEN WORKING FOR ENGEDI, WAS HOSTING THE MEETING. (NOTE: ACCORDING TO KIM, THERE ARE FIVE CHRISTIAN KOREAN FAMILIES WORKING FOR ENGEDI. END NOTE.) FOR TWO-AND-HALF HOURS, GOTX OFFICIALS INTERROGATED THE MEMBERS, WROTE A REPORT ON THE UNREGISTERED RELIGIOUS MEETING, AND REQUESTED MEMBERS RE-ENACT THE MEETING'S ACTIVITIES WHILE POLICE VIDEOTAPED THEM. THE OFFICIALS CONFISCATED BIBLES AND DISCIPLESHIP MATERIALS IN TURKMEN, VIDEOTAPES, JANG'S PERSONAL PHOTO ALBUM, LAPTOP COMPUTER AND PASSPORT. LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS SAID THEY WOULD PASS JANG'S PASSPORT TO THE STATE SERVICE FOR THE REGISTRATION OF FOREIGNERS WHO WOULD THEN RETURN IT.

LOCAL MEMBERS' FOLLOW-UP INTERROGATIONS

¶2. (SBU) DURING THE DAYS FOLLOWING THE RAID, THE MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY CALLED LOCAL CHURCH MEMBERS TO AN ASHGABAT DISTRICT OFFICE AND INTERROGATED THEM ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN FAITH EVANGELISTS AND THE SOURCE OF THEIR FUNDING. THE OFFICERS ATTEMPTED TO INTIMIDATE THE BELIEVERS AND DISCREDIT JANG AND OTHER KOREANS AFFILIATED WITH THE CHURCH SAYING THE FOREIGNER EVANGELISTS HAD COVERT PLANS IN REGARD TO THEIR RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY. ON MAY 15, CRA OFFICIALS TRIED TO CONVINCE ETHNIC TURKMEN MEMBER SHOHLE TO RECONVERT TO ISLAM.

POSSIBILITY OF DEPORTATION

13. (SBU) JANG IS FACING DEPORTATION THREATS FOR HOSTING AN UNREGISTERED RELIGIOUS MEETING. ON MAY 15, THE STATE SERVICE FOR THE REGISTRATION OF FOREIGNERS CALLED THE ENGEDI COMPANY AND REQUESTED A LETTER CALLING FOR JANG'S VOLUNTARY DEPARTURE FROM TURKMENISTAN. KIM AND JANG ARE CURRENTLY CONSIDERING OPTIONS INCLUDING "STANDING FIRM UNTIL HE IS DEPORTED." WITH HIS VISA EXPIRING ON JUNE 10, KIM IS ALSO CONCERNED IT WILL NOT BE RENEWED BECAUSE HIS "CONNECTION WITH THE SOYGI CHURCH IS OBVIOUSLY KNOWN TO THE GOVERNMENT."

KIM'S BUSINESS

14. (SBU) KIM IS ALSO CONCERNED ABOUT THE STATUS OF THE ENGEDI COMPANY. THE COMPANY IS PRIMARILY ENGAGED IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE, AND KIM HAS INVESTED AROUND USD 200,000 IN ITS REAL ESTATE PROPERTY. HE FEARS THE GOTX MIGHT WANT TO CONFISCATE THE FIRM AND ITS PROPERTY; KIM WILL BE APPLYING FOR U.S. BUSINESS ADVOCACY ASSISTANCE.

CHURCH REGISTRATION PLANS

15. (SBU) THE EXISTENCE OF THE CHURCH GROUP HAS BECOME PUBLIC, AND KIM SAYS THEY ARE LOOKING INTO REGISTRATION, "EVEN IF WE [FOREIGNERS] GET DEPORTED, LOCAL CHURCH MEMBERS WILL PURSUE THE REGISTRATION."

COMMENT

16. (SBU) TO POLECONOFF'S SURPRISE, PAUL KIM SOUNDED IGNORANT OF REGISTRATION DETAILS AND NOT TOO OPTIMISTIC ABOUT ITS ADVANTAGES. OBVIOUSLY, THE GROUP DID NOT WANT TO

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EXPOSE ITSELF TO THE GOTX. POLOFF WELCOMED THE GROUP'S DECISION TO PURSUE REGISTRATION. END COMMENT.

BRUSH